

How do media talk about the Covid-19 pandemic? Metaphorical thematic clustering in Italian online newspapers

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BACKGROUND and MOTIVATION

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Semino 2008): Metaphors as COGNITIVE phenomenon CMT used to describe socioeconomic and health crises (Sontag, 1990; Besomi, 2019)

"(...) in the media, metaphors often are used to popularize and condense complex issues" (Hellsten, 2000:214)

> The use of metaphors helps frame complex issues, but often hinders aspects that do not fit with the metaphorical representation chosen

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1. What are the major themes discussed by the Italian press in the first months of the pandemic outbreak?
- 2. Do themes in the press change with the shift from Phase 1 (Feb 24 April 26) to Phase 2 (April 27 June 2)? If yes, when did this shift happen?

 3. Can we identify networks of metaphors pertaining to the identified themes?

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

DATA:

❖ Corpus of online news articles (430K words), Phase1 and Phase2 subcorpora (300 and 211 articles each)

METHODS:

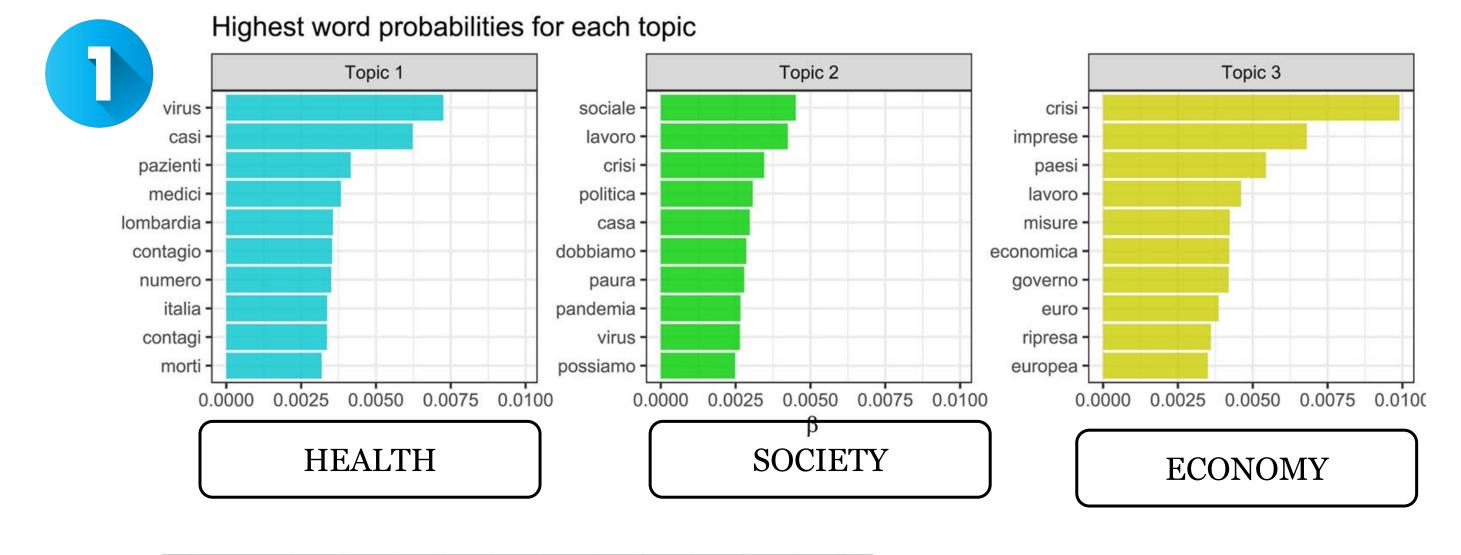
Structural Topic Modelling (STM) +

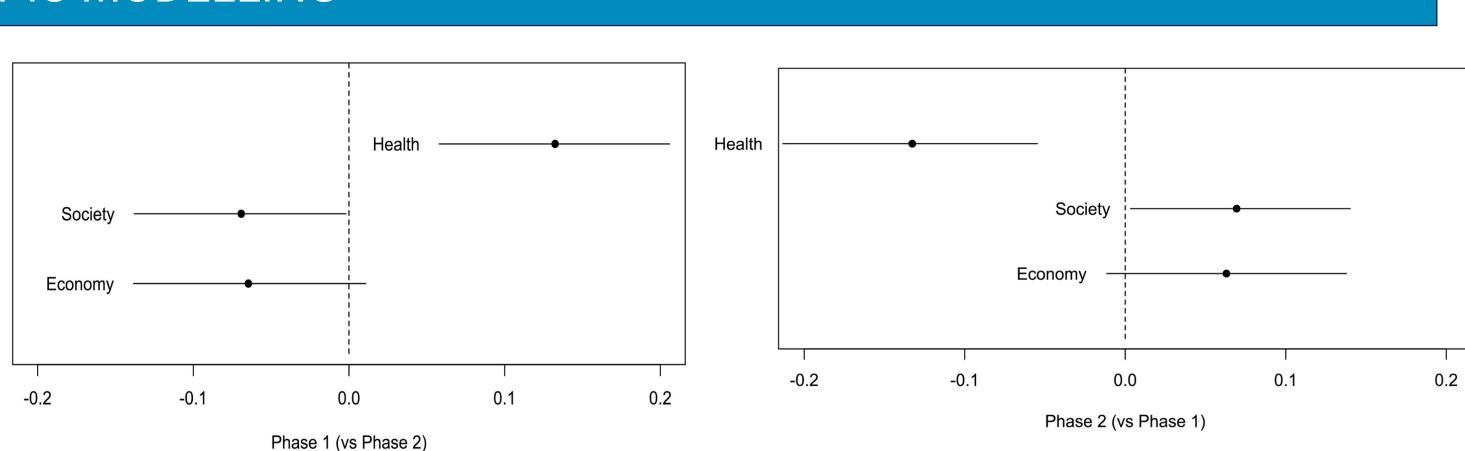




corpus-based metaphor retrieval and qualitative analysis

STRUCTURAL TOPIC MODELLING





Significant change of topic prevalence between phases (HEALTH: p < .0001; SOCIETY: p= .05; ECONOMY: p \approx .05) \rightarrow from a discourse centred around the health crisis, shift to a discussion of the socio-economic crisis



Significant decrease for HEALTH and increase for ECONOMY (p > .005) around week 8 (13-19 April)

→ prevalence of socio-economic topics in the press starts around 10 days before the official announcement of Phase 2.

week1 week2 week3 week4 week5 week6 week7 week8 week9 week10 week11 week12 week13 week14 METAPHORS OF THE COVID CRISES COMPLEX SYSTEMS COMPLEX SYSTEMS ARE ARE LIVING CRISES ARE NATURAL ORGANISMS STRUCTURED OBJECTS FORCES (Cardini, 2014) (Kövecses, 2003) (Kövecses, 2003) SOCIETY IS A LIVING ECONOMY IS A LIVING ORGANISM ORGANISM ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL **ECONOMIES** SOCIETIES HEALTH CRISES ARE CRISES ARE NATURAL ARE COMPLEX ARE COMPLEX NATURAL DISASTERS DISASTERS STRUCTURES STRUCTURES ECONOMY IS A PATIENT SOCIETY IS A PATIENT CRISIS IS A TSUNAMI, ECONOMY AND ECONOMY AND EARTHQUAKE, WILDFIRE VIRUS IS A TSUNAMI SOCIETY ARE A SOCIETY ARE A MACHINE BUILDING STORM SOCIETAL SOCIAL PROBLEMS ARE ECONOMIC PROSPERIT FUNCTIONING IS PHYSICAL AFFLICTIONS PHYSICAL HEALTH IS PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Same metaphor, different meaning: VIRUS IS A TSUNAMI (The infectious disease specialist: "It was a tsunami, now it has become a small wave") vs CRISIS IS A TSUNAMI (After Coronavirus, the tsunami of the economy)
- Health both as a source and target domain
- ❖ Economy and Society represented as (sick) living organisms or (collapsing) structures